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New York

Chairman: U Mya Than ..... (Myanmar)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda items 65 to 81 (*continued*)

General debate on all disarmament and international security items

Ms. Ibraimova (Kyrgyzstan): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the chairmanship of the First Committee. My delegation pledges to work with you to achieve substantive progress and success in the work of the First Committee. My felicitations also go to the other members of the Bureau.

As this session of the General Assembly is taking place following the historic Millennium Summit and the successful conclusion of the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), it has special significance. The Final Document adopted by the Review Conference is testimony to the determination of the world community to maintain and strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime. We welcome the outcome of the 2000 Review Conference of the parties to the NPT and urge all States, particularly the nuclear-weapon States, to follow up the commitments made at the NPT Conference.

We believe that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in Africa and South-East Asia was a positive development. Negotiated nuclear-weapon-free zones now cover the whole of the southern hemisphere, in addition to Antarctica, the seabed and outer space, and constitute one of the most promising approaches to non-proliferation and disarmament. In this regard, we welcome the joint statement of the five permanent members of the Security Council, made by Mr. John Holum, United States Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs, on 5 October 2000 in the First Committee as an important step towards the implementation of General Assembly resolution 53/77 D.

The significant progress that has been made towards the creation a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia is noteworthy. The Kyrgyz Republic, as one of the five Central Asian countries, shares the belief that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in our region, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at between our States and taking into account its special characteristics, will strengthen peace and security at the regional and global levels.

We would like to call particular attention to the efforts, under United Nations auspices, of the working group on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. In July 1998, the working group held a meeting in Bishkek involving the five Central Asian States, the five nuclear-weapon States, the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency. The group has also held meetings in Geneva, Tashkent, New York and Sapporo. As a result of these meetings, our States have produced a nearly completed treaty establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. We are grateful to the United Nations, the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia

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and the Pacific, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Government of Japan for their support of negotiations to establish this zone. We would welcome the continued assistance of interested international organizations and States as this process moves towards completion. My delegation would like to reiterate its proposal to host the signing ceremony of this treaty on the shores of beautiful lake Issyk-Kul.

In speaking of world security, one cannot avoid the issue of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Signed in 1972, it became an important cornerstone of strategic stability. In this regard, Kyrgyzstan attaches considerable importance to the full implementation of the ABM Treaty, in accordance with the General Assembly resolution adopted last year, and calls on Member States to reconfirm today its role in international security.

The people of Kyrgyzstan share the view of the Secretary-General that achieving sustainable peace and security for all countries remains a central objective of the United Nations. However, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is not the only threat to world security. The challenges posed by the harmful effects of armed conflicts, international terrorism, drug smuggling and illicit trafficking in small arms also threaten world stability and security, and they are not confined by the national borders of any one country. No individual country can cope on its own with these challenges. The struggle against terrorism should be conducted at the national, regional and international levels.

The invasions of the southern part of the Kyrgyz Republic by international terrorists in 1999 and August of this year testify to the fact that international terrorist organizations have every intention of perpetrating criminal activities in the territories of the States of Central Asia. These actions should be seen for what they are: part of a global plan of international terrorism, with the express purpose of destabilizing a wide region.

An important step directed towards strengthening regional security is the Summit of the heads of State of the members of the Shanghai Five, which is assuming a definitive character. The Bishkek group was created in the framework of the Shanghai forum. This group of law-enforcement bodies and special services of the member countries conducts work aimed at coordinating our countries' actions in preventing and confronting all signs of international terrorism, extremism, separatism, the illegal drug trade, the smuggling of weapons, illegal migration and other kinds of criminal activity. The Bishkek meeting of the heads of State of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and the special envoy of the President of the Russian Federation, which was held on 20 August 2000, demonstrated the unanimous resolve of the countries of Central Asia and Russia jointly to eradicate the threat of terrorism from their territories. A summit meeting of heads of States parties to the Collective Security Treaty is being held in Bishkek today. We believe that this summit will serve as a cornerstone for further attempts and efforts on the part of our countries to deal with these problems. We believe that the efforts undertaken by our countries will be supported by the international community. The United Nations plays the most important role in this process.

The ongoing civil war in Afghanistan and the presence of armed militant groups in the region are having increasingly harmful effects on Central Asia. In this regard, we are looking forward to the United Nations Conference on small arms, scheduled to take place next year, which we hope will provide a valuable opportunity to consolidate and further strengthen international cooperation in preventing the tremendous suffering and loss of human life resulting from the illicit traffic in small arms.

The delegation of the Kyrgyz Republic will work closely with all delegations to achieve significant results in order to translate our concern over these issues into concrete measures for their resolution.

Mr. Getahoun (Ethiopia): My delegation wishes to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your election to guide the work of this Committee. We are confident that your extensive background in the field of disarmament will lead to the successful completion of our Committee's work.

The end of the cold war has led to some positive developments, including the conclusion and entry into force of a number of international instruments in the field of disarmament. Notwithstanding these achievements, we continue to face enormous challenges, in particular those associated with the reduction and elimination of weapons of mass destruction. In fact, the post-cold-war era has brought with it new challenges, as evidenced by the danger of the proliferation of such weapons, especially nuclear

weapons. With the failure to agree on the elimination of these weapons within a mutually agreed time-frame, the goal of achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world seems as remote as ever.

Ethiopia is satisfied with the successful conclusion of the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and believes that the consensus reached in the Final Document of the 2000 Review Conference is a positive step towards achieving the objectives set forth in the Treaty. With this in mind, Ethiopia calls on all States, especially those directly concerned, to work actively towards implementing the practical steps outlined in the Treaty with a view to achieving the ultimate objective of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The task embarked upon by the international community to curb the illicit circulation and proliferation of small arms and light weapons is, indeed, a very commendable one. My delegation feels that sustained efforts should be made towards strengthening international, regional and subregional cooperation to combat and eliminate this illegal activity. In this regard, of paramount importance is the need to provide more assistance in order to complement the efforts of countries and regions affected by the illicit trade in and circulation of small arms. Ethiopia is optimistic that the Conference to be held in the year 2001 will be a useful forum for the discussion and adoption of concrete measures to combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, thereby promoting international cooperation in this important struggle.

Ethiopia attaches great importance to the role of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in promoting regional cooperation in addressing the problems associated with the illicit use, transfer and manufacture of small arms and light weapons. Moreover, Ethiopia is confident that the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa will play a pivotal role in enhancing the African capacity to coordinate policy and increase the capacity of institutional arrangements to address the illicit proliferation and circulation of and trafficking in small arms. My delegation supports the recommendation made by the international consultative body, which met in Addis Ababa in June 2000 and proposed that the OAU should implement a coordinated approach towards the prevention and reduction of the illicit proliferation of and trade in small arms and light weapons.

My delegation also acknowledges the work undertaken by the Department for Disarmament Affairs in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, and by the Group of Interested States on Practical Disarmament Measures, which has coordinated efforts to provide support for projects and programmes on practical disarmament and related development issues, including support for weapons collection and destruction programmes. The financial contribution by members of the Group of Interested States to the Trust Fund for the Consolidation of Peace through Practical Disarmament Measures is highly commendable.

Of equal importance is the Nairobi Declaration, which aims at the effective implementation of the relevant decisions of the United Nations and the OAU and other regional arrangements that address the problem of illicit small arms and light weapons in the subregion. In this context, Ethiopia calls upon the international community to provide increased support for programmes and initiatives that advance human security and promote conditions conducive to long-term peace, stability and development.

My delegation wishes to turn briefly to the detrimental impact of landmines. Many parts of Africa, including our own subregion of the Horn of Africa, are plagued by landmines, which have profoundly endangered the lives of our peoples. In addition to their deadly impact, these mines have also vastly contributed to the setback in our economic, social and humanitarian activities. Ethiopia is one of the countries most affected by landmines. Millions of landmines are scattered throughout different parts of the country, causing enormous hardship and human losses. In recognition of the gravity of this problem, the Government of Ethiopia is working on demining activities. It must be stressed, however, that financial and technical support is critically needed to enable these landmines to be successfully eradicated. The lack of adequate assistance in the rehabilitation of the population affected by these deadly weapons is also of grave concern to Ethiopia.

Ethiopia, as one of the signatories of the Ottawa Convention, is satisfied with the ongoing attempt to outlaw and eradicate landmines. This trend must be consolidated with practical measures aimed at

promoting international cooperation, including universal adherence to the Convention. The second annual meeting of the States parties to the Convention, held in September 2000, was an important step towards achieving this goal. Ethiopia, having signed the Convention in 1997, is taking steps to ratify it.

With the adoption of the Millennium Summit Declaration, the international community once again reaffirmed its commitment to achieve the goal of disarmament, especially the eradication of all weapons of mass destruction. It is in this spirit that we should consolidate our efforts to continue to advance this common cause.

Mr. Thu (Myanmar): Mr. Chairman, at the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your well-deserved, unanimous election. I am fully confident that your skilful and able leadership, as well as your vast experience of disarmament and other international issues, will lead us to a successful conclusion of our deliberations. My tribute also goes to the other members of the Bureau.

The Millennium Summit, the largest-ever gathering of heads of State and Government, gave us the chance to reflect on our successes, as well as the failures, during the last 55 years' history of the United Nations. At the same time, it gave an impetus to our efforts to create a better world for future generations. My delegation believes that the Assembly will relay the torch of the millennium spirit to the generations to come.

The United Nations was created to maintain international peace and security in order "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". Under the United Nations Charter, Member States have to take effective collective measures for the prevention of threats to international peace and security. I would like to stress that it is vitally important that in doing so we make every effort to meet the following commitments concerning weapons of mass destruction and the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons, which we agreed upon in the Millennium Declaration:

> "To strive for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, and to keep all options open for achieving this aim, including the possibility of convening an international conference to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers.
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> "To take concerted action to end illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons, especially by making arms transfers more transparent and supporting regional disarmament measures, taking account of all the recommendations of the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons." (*resolution 55/2, para. 9*)

Allow me now to touch on the bright side of the disarmament agenda. At the 2000 Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) held in New York last May, agreement was reached between nuclear-weapon-States and non-nuclear-weapon-States on, as stated in the Final Document:

> "An unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament".

We agreed that the total elimination of nuclear weapons was the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. It was also reaffirmed that legally binding security assurances by the five nuclear-weapon States parties to the Treaty would strengthen the non-proliferation regime. By those agreements, we have been able to transform our vision into a reality.

As a strong advocate of nuclear disarmament, my delegation has successfully presented the draft resolution on nuclear disarmament, with the support of Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and the overwhelming support of other Member States, since the golden jubilee of the United Nations. This year we will again submit a draft resolution, which reflects not only traditional outlooks, but also the present-day realities and priorities, including a call for the convening of an international conference on nuclear disarmament in all its aspects at an early date. We hope that Member States will respond positively, as in the past.

My delegation believes that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the regions concerned will definitely and effectively promote international peace and security. We would also like to express continued support for the declaration of Mongolia's single-State nuclear-weapon-free status.

Myanmar warmly welcomes the ratification by the Russian Federation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the START II Treaty. As is well known, the CTBT's entry into force is in jeopardy. This has adversely affected the universality of the membership of the CTBT and the NPT. At the same time, it will heavily influence other multilateral negotiations; the Treaty could serve as a huge stepping stone towards the negotiations on START III. My delegation is of the view that the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty is a cornerstone of the maintenance of global peace and security. I wish to stress that preservation of this Treaty is the only way to guarantee a safer world. In this connection, the recent decision of the United States Administration to postpone the deployment of a national missile defence system is commendable.

Due to their easy availability, small arms and light weapons are mostly used in the majority of armed conflicts. Therefore, the convening in 2001 of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects is a step in the right direction. We hope that the Conference will help us find ways and means to address all the problems linked to small arms and light weapons.

In conclusion, I would like to express our appreciation to the United Nations Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa for their effective contributions to educating people, helping them learn more about disarmament. Regional seminars and forums are really helpful in enhancing awareness of disarmament.

Mr. Jerandi (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of my delegation, I take pleasure, Mr. Chairman, in congratulating you on your election to preside over the First Committee. I assure you of my delegation's support and cooperation to ensure that our work achieves positive results. I also extend my sincere congratulations to your predecessor, Ambassador González, on the excellent way in which he guided the Committee's work during the previous session.

This new session of our Committee, the first of the new millennium, offers us a new opportunity to consider progress made in the field of disarmament and the work that lies ahead to achieve the goals that the international community has set itself, in particular nuclear disarmament, the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and the implementation of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control. In engaging in this new assessment, we are focusing in particular on the contribution of the past year to our consolidation of the foundations of international security.

At the onset of the new millennium, several objectives have become important disarmament priorities for the international community. The millennium report of the Secretary-General and the Millennium Declaration of 8 September identified several important issues that we must resolve, such as the need to progress towards elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and to put a halt to the trade in small arms and light weapons and the universalization of norms in the area of anti-personnel landmines.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) remains the cornerstone of the world non-proliferation system and the basic foundation for pursuing nuclear disarmament — hence, the interest attached to the adherence of all countries of the world in order to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime. We wish to state here that the universality of the NPT is an element of its strength and credibility and an objective towards which we must work tirelessly.

The nuclear-weapon States took an unprecedented decision at the sixth Review Conference of Parties to the NPT when they made an unequivocal commitment to the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, in accordance with article VI of that Treaty. This result, obtained after many years of negotiation and efforts made by the international community, is both an important step forward and a starting point towards the effective achievement of the desired results.

The ratification of START II and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) by the Russian Federation; the positive results achieved at the last NPT Conference; the increased number of CTBT ratifications; the two-year halt in nuclear tests; the respect for the de facto moratorium on nuclear testing by the five nuclear-weapon States; and the decision of the United States Government not to delay authorizing the deployment of a national anti-missile defence system are elements that should bolster the efforts of the international community to put an end to nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction.

The international community awaits and hopes to see a firmer and more decisive commitment to general disarmament. It is important today to implement tangibly and immediately the objectives and principles set out and announced at various international forums. In that framework, my delegation notes with regret that the Conference on Disarmament, the sole forum for multilateral negotiation in the field of disarmament, is still having trouble reaching an agreement on its programme of work.

My country believes that the treaty banning the production and stockpiling of fissile material for military use, which is on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, is an important instrument for strengthening nuclear non-proliferation and contributing to nuclear disarmament. It should be emphasized, however, that this instrument is not yet even in negotiation. In the view of my country, efforts should be accelerated to that end.

The first step towards the implementation of the provisions of article VI of the NPT, as agreed at the 1995 Conference, was the conclusion of negotiations on the CTBT. That Treaty's continued failure to enter into force is a source of real concern, in particular because of its non-ratification by certain nuclear-weapon States.

The special responsibility of the group of 44 States whose ratification is necessary to the entry into force of the CTBT should prompt those in that group that have not yet done so to ratify the instrument without delay in order to encourage States parties to follow their example in concluding this important phase of international non-proliferation.

The creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones and the strengthening of those already in existence are also an important means of promoting non-proliferation on the regional and international levels. In this context, Tunisia, a State party to the NPT and a signatory of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, has continually reaffirmed the importance it attaches to the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among States of the region concerned and to the creation of zones free of weapons of mass destruction. With respect to the Middle East, the commitment of the States of the region remains blocked by Israel, which refuses to accede to the NPT and to submit its nuclear installations to the comprehensive safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency, despite the numerous appeals of other States of the region and of the General Assembly in its many resolutions devoted to this question, as well as those of the States parties to the NPT at the last Review Conference.

In the area of conventional weapons, the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction was an important event attesting to the will of the international community to put an end to the sufferings of civilians, who are an easy target of this type of weapon, which strikes indiscriminately in times of war and times of peace.

Aware of the great importance of this Convention and of its positive implications for peace and international security, Tunisia ratified it at the earliest possible opportunity. My country's commitment to eliminating this category of devastating weapon was demonstrated by the destruction of anti-personnel landmines at an official ceremony in Tunis attended by an official representative of the United Nations. We hope that all States parties will participate in this process in order to implement the objectives of the Convention.

Regarding the issue of the proliferation, circulation and illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, the harm and destruction they can wreak and the threat they pose to the national and regional security of States, Tunisia supports the efforts of regional and international organizations in this area. My country would emphasize the importance of measures adopted at the most recent Summit of the Organization of African Unity, which reflect the will and determination of the African countries to cope with this scourge.

Moreover, we support the decision of the General Assembly to convene the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects in 2001. We need to work together to guarantee the success of the work of that Conference. My delegation hopes to see determined and coordinated action by the international community in this area, under the auspices of the United Nations.

Tunisia attaches great importance to strengthening security and cooperation in the Mediterranean and has spared no effort to consolidate peace and stability there, with its partners from the

Maghreb and Europe, in order to promote development and prosperity in that region.

Tunisia is resolutely playing an active role in the Mediterranean region. We are working towards a global, multidimensional and common approach between the two shores of the Mediterranean basin that would promote dialogue and encourage cooperation. This approach is indeed helping to strengthen partnership in the Mediterranean in addressing the challenges threatening the region, such as terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

In conclusion, we hope that the new millennium will allow us to advance in the promotion of peace and security in a world free of arsenals. My country will continue to play its role in promoting disarmament.

I cannot conclude without thanking the Secretary-General and the Department for Disarmament Affairs, with Under-Secretary-General Jayantha Dhanapala at its head, for their efforts to advance the work of the various forums dealing with disarmament, including this Commission.

The Chairman: I call on the representative of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Mr. Vaher (United Nations Children's Fund): We very much welcome this opportunity of addressing the First Committee on an issue of great importance to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and their impact on children.

It is today's reality that small arms and light weapons have become the main instruments of violence in conflicts. Small arms are now responsible for no less than 90 per cent of war casualties. Since 1990, over 3 million people have been killed by small arms and light weapons, and children accounted for a quarter of these. This means that, in the past 10 years, 750,000 children were killed directly by small arms and light weapons.

The Secretary-General has clearly stated in his millennium report that

> "Small arms proliferation is not merely a security issue; it is also an issue of human rights and of development. The proliferation of small arms sustains and exacerbates armed conflicts. It endangers peacekeepers and humanitarian workers. It undermines respect for international humanitarian law." (*A/54/2000, para. 239*)

There is today a growing awareness of the cruel reality which sees children, often as young as 10 years of age or less, used as child soldiers. The link between small arms and child soldiering is direct and obvious: the fact that modern small arms are widespread, cheap, very lightweight and easy to handle encourages the involvement of children in conflict. As a rebel leader once formulated, "the term 'small arms' means they are meant for small children".

Even for children in societies at peace, when small arms are widely available and where lack of safety measures makes for widespread possession, these weapons pose a threat to children and their security. The widespread possession of firearms fosters a culture of violence, often stimulated by a glorification of weapons by the entertainment industry. There is an urgent need, therefore, for public education and awareness programmes which will contribute to the promotion of peace. We need not only to ensure that children do not have access to these fatal tools, but also to teach children to resolve conflict in a non-violent way. UNICEF currently supports such initiatives in several countries, including Albania, and we are working with our United Nations partners, particularly the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in this area.

The ready flow of small arms and light weapons, ongoing even in situations where Security Council weapons embargoes are in place, fuels and prolongs conflict. In many of the current conflicts, diamonds, oil, narcotics and timber are traded for small arms and light weapons.

This situation needs to change. Arms embargoes should be fully and effectively implemented and monitored; violations should be criminalized. This will require political commitment and legal support from the affected States, the producing countries and third States. Arms embargoes should be imposed in situations where civilians are deliberately targeted or where the parties are known to be involved in gross violations of human rights, including child soldiering.

It is important also that the corporate sector develop appropriate codes of conduct — as the International Diamond Manufacturers Association did in Antwerp in July 2000 — to prevent groups from selling diamonds or other resources to finance the purchase of arms.

In crisis environments where small arms are a reality, worried parents keep their children inside, away from the street and away from school. When collecting firewood, working the land, going to market or even visiting health centres become dangerous activities, parents lose their mobility, and this affects their means of income. This can have severe effects on the psychological development of children as well as on the overall economic development of the society and the well-being of families.

Also troubling is the increased availability of small arms among refugees and internally displaced persons in camp situations. Whether it involves organized armed groups or people trying to protect themselves, this situation creates a threat to children's well-being. Small arms and light weapons pose a great threat to humanitarian workers, as we at UNICEF and those in our sister United Nations organizations have sadly discovered. Over the last several years there has been a steep increase in violence against humanitarian and peacekeeping personnel who provide protection to children and civilians. When our workers face threats at gunpoint and worse, humanitarian assistance is delayed or suspended, and costs rise. Moreover, in these environments providing children's protection becomes very difficult. When facilities are closed down, food distribution is stalled and assistance is cut off, it is again the most vulnerable — the children — who are hit the hardest.

The impact of small arms and light weapons often continues long after conflict has formally ceased. Widespread availability of small arms and light weapons is a serious obstacle for post-conflict reconstruction and destabilizes societies engaged in peace-building by creating an environment for criminal and contraband activities. In all too many cases, violence sustained by the availability of small arms does not diminish in a post-conflict setting.

Former soldiers may see no means to get income other than turning to crime. Often in these situations, the authorities do not have the capacity to restore the rule of law, not least because the State police forces lack resources, training and equipment. To provide a sustainable basis for peace, practical disarmament combined with demobilization and reintegration measures should be included in all peace agreements and carried out with special attention to child soldiers.

Weapons must be removed from civilian hands. Fuelled by insecurity, fear and instability, individual citizens may acquire arms to defend themselves, their families and property, thereby stimulating the circle of violence. When people bring guns into their houses, more peaceful ways of conflict resolution are neglected. The weapons-for-development programmes which are now undertaken by regional organizations and United Nations agencies, including the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme, are a promising approach. In exchange for weapons there is support for development projects selected by the community. For such programmes to be successful, it is extremely important that the voices of youth and women be heard. Civil society has an extremely important role in these efforts.

UNICEF welcomes the many important ongoing activities that address the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and their negative impact on children, especially the regional initiatives such as that of the Organization of African Unity and the Economic Community of West African States Moratorium. We believe these initiatives deserve wide support. UNICEF also looks forward to the successful completion of the negotiations of the protocol against the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components, and ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Currently, UNICEF and the other members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee are conducting a study on the humanitarian impact of small arms and light weapons. The recent Winnipeg Conference on War-Affected Children called for a study on the impact of small arms on children, in which UNICEF will participate. Both studies will be completed by the time of the international Conference on small arms in 2001, and we hope they will lead to concerted action.

UNICEF attaches great importance to that Conference. We think that it provides a crucial forum to address the problem of small arms and light weapons and its humanitarian and developmental impact. We therefore call upon Member States to ensure that, in particular, the impact on children gets specific attention in this process.

Among the issues we would see as priorities are reducing the legal trade of small arms and eliminating arms sales to regions of conflict, strengthening

mechanisms for prevention and control of the illicit trade and stockpiling of small arms, monitoring and enforcing arms embargoes and seeking commitments to withhold military aid to countries or groups which use child soldiers. UNICEF stands ready to contribute as appropriate to these upcoming endeavours.

Finally, delegations that wish to have additional information on what UNICEF may be doing in limiting the impact of small arms and light weapons on children will find a document on a table at the side of the room on UNICEF actions on behalf of children affected by armed conflict, a document that was prepared for and distributed at the Winnipeg Conference.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic was scheduled to deliver this statement; he apologizes for not being able to be present, for reasons beyond his control.

It gives me pleasure to express our congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of this Committee. Also, our congratulations go to other members of the Bureau for the trust placed in them. We are confident that, given your skills and vast experience, the Committee will be able to complete its work constructively and successfully. Also, we would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Dhanapala, the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, for the effort he is making to fulfil his mandate.

With the beginning of a new millennium and a new century, the peoples of the world look forward with rising hopes to a world that is more just and secure. The eyes of children and women and peace-loving people all over the globe look to the United Nations in the hope of seeing a future in which the stronger don't kill the weaker, in which bullets don't kill a child huddled in the arms of his father, in which war planes and missiles don't sow treachery and violence or destroy the homes of innocent people. All mankind further hopes that in the not too distant future nuclear weapons in particular and all other lethal weapons in general will be a legacy of the past.

It is inadmissible — under any pretext — to manufacture and stockpile nuclear weapons or to use such weapons or to threaten to use them against others. Therefore, vigorous efforts must be pursued to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons in particular — as stressed in the Millennium Declaration.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects, which must be given special attention by this Committee, is to reject double standards or tampering with the fate of nations by using different labels and phraseology. While some parties deplore the right of a people to use stones to defend their dignity, their land and right to self-determination, those same parties allow others to stockpile and use all types of weaponry, heavy and light. Furthermore, these same parties provide missiles, tanks and war planes to the party committing aggressive acts and open their nuclear installations to these aggressors, so that they can gain technical knowledge to make nuclear weapons.

Throughout its long history humanity has witnessed devastating wars with catastrophic consequences. In those wars different types of weaponry have been used and vast resources have been squandered. Nuclear weapons were produced, destroying the little hope that remained and leaving everyone living under the constant threat of nuclear holocaust. This led to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which was designed to revive hopes that the nuclear threat could be controlled. However, those hopes ebbed away and evaporated when the 1995 NPT was extended indefinitely with its loopholes uncorrected. These loopholes gave some States an opening not to accede to the Treaty, thus impeding the Treaty's universalization — which is one of the most important conditions — and preparing the way for a nuclear arms race, following the extension of that Treaty in the framework of an unstable and unjust international order.

During the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, Syria and other Arab States — and most countries of the world — urged the five nuclear-weapon States not to exempt any State from having to accede to the Treaty. That call was not heeded, and thus a new nuclear arms race was set off.

This new arms race provides a clear example of the shortcomings in the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which failed to put an end to all forms and modalities of nuclear testing and to the qualitative development of nuclear weapons. Thus this Treaty allows nuclear-weapon States to improve their nuclear weapons through simulation and testing below

the critical stage. The Treaty is not comprehensive and has made it easier for the nuclear arms race to be resumed.

The Syrian Arab Republic has strongly endorsed the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones all over the world. From this position, and given the extremely sensitive character of the Middle East region, the Syrian Arab Republic tries to keep the region free of a nuclear arms race. But Israel alone refuses to accede to the NPT. It also refuses to subject its nuclear facilities to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) comprehensive safeguards system. Israel's nuclear positions and policies enjoy the support of some major Powers, which have enabled it to manufacture and acquire nuclear weapons under untenable and completely illogical pretexts.

It is relevant to recall here that the Israeli nuclear danger not only threatens peace and security in the Middle East region, but also endangers Africa, some Asian States and even some European countries. Information published in the United States of America and in many countries suggests that Israel's arsenal of nuclear weapons contains more than 300 missiles of different sizes and capabilities and bombs loaded with various chemical and biological agents. Moreover, Israel has new delivery systems that make it possible for these weapons to reach targets more than 3,000 kilometres away. This means that Israel is overloaded with nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction and with the most advanced aircraft for the delivery of these weapons.

Policies based on double-standards in dealing with countries are unacceptable. It is unacceptable that this one State enjoys all forms of support and protection and is provided with the most advanced technology and weapons, especially nuclear weapons, while even simple technology is denied to other countries that need such nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, especially for development purposes.

Now more than ever the international community is called upon to pressure Israel and to urge it to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to subject all its nuclear installations to the IAEA comprehensive safeguards system. It is essential to bring all forms of pressure to bear on Israel to force it to abandon its aggressive military policies, which include acquiring nuclear weapons. Israel must be forced to end its occupation of Arab territories and to stop threatening peace and security — not only in our region but throughout the world.

The priorities of the international community in the area of disarmament are the same ones as were clearly defined in the final document of the General Assembly's first special session on disarmament, which was held in 1978. This document made it abundantly clear that the issue of nuclear weapons is the top priority for the international community in the area of disarmament. This was emphasized in the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the illegality of the use or threat of use of lethal nuclear weapons, given the dangers that such weapons pose to international peace and security. Also, the Millennium Summit Declaration emphasized the need to eliminate nuclear weapons and to hold an international conference to mobilize global efforts to fulfil this mandate.

On the other hand, we look forward to the convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the convening of which has become most urgent in view of inherently dangerous developments on the international scene that must be addressed expeditiously.

Furthermore, Syria emphasizes that the scope of the international Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects due to be held in 2001 must address the question of illicit trade in small arms only. Additionally, the participation of the largest number of member States must be ensured.

Syria voted last year in favour of the resolution regarding the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM) and stated its intention to comply with that Treaty, given our conviction that the Treaty contributes to global stability and strategic balance and constitutes a key component among bilateral and multilateral disarmament agreements. ABM deployment would flagrantly violate that Treaty and would open the door for another arms race that would spread into outer space and lead to dire consequences for global, as well as regional, strategic balance.

The Syrian Arab Republic follows closely the question of transparency in armaments as a whole. In this area, Syria strongly supports the response given by the Arab group and believes that Member States should

take into consideration Arab concerns when that important aspect of the United Nations work is discussed, so that the United Nations Register would include weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons. Moreover, it must take into account the situation in the Middle East, the occupation by Israel of Arab territories, Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapons and its refusal to subject its nuclear installations to the International Atomic Energy Agency's comprehensive safeguards system, while Arab States do not possess any such weapons.

Israel's military capabilities pose a mounting threat to the situation in the Middle East and to global peace and security. During this period, Israel has become a great depot for the most advanced, lethal weapons, including nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

The military budget report for the years 1998/1999 issued by the International Institute of Strategic Studies states that Israel has probably become the sixth largest military Power in the world. Israel has about 700,000 troops, 4,300 tanks, 6,650 artillery pieces and over 500 modern military aircraft and 137 helicopter gunships, five submarines, an unknown number of advanced long-range and short-range rockets, as well as radar-jamming electronic equipment and unmanned surveillance planes.

All Arabs and all peace-loving people look forward to the curtailment of the Israeli military effort. Sowing the seeds of hope and moving mankind a step forward towards progress would require serious effort in the area of disarmament. This noble goal cannot be met without the genuine political will, strict compliance with international treaties and instruments and abandoning of the policy of double standards. Sincere and tireless efforts in this regard would bring us closer to our noble goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and the destruction of other lethal weapons of mass destruction in order to save our nations from the dire consequences of wars that have claimed the lives of over five million people in the last decade.

Mr. Al-Hassan (Oman) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to convey to you, Sir, on behalf of my delegation, our most sincere congratulations on your assumption of the chairmanship of the First Committee. I also wish to congratulate the other members of the Bureau on their election. My delegation confirms its full readiness to cooperate with you to accomplish our desired goals.

Allow me also to express our happiness at seeing Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament amongst us. There is now doubt that the end of the cold war has enabled the international community to accomplish relative success in the context of disarmament. There is also no doubt that the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention as well as the conclusion of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) would all contribute to rendering our world more stable and secure than ever before, if the provisions of these Conventions were implemented in good faith.

My country which acceded to all the international Treaties dealing with weapons of mass destruction, welcomes these positive steps and confirms the necessity for continuing efforts to achieve the total elimination of weapons of mass destruction.

Despite all the efforts, both global and regional, to establish durable peace and coexistence amongst peoples, Israeli nuclear dangle a sword of Damocles threatening international peace and security, and create concern that undermine the opportunities for establishing a durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Proceeding from that premise, my country welcomes the recommendations of the recent Review Conference on the NPT, which call on all States in the region that have not yet acceded to the NPT to immediately join it and to place all their nuclear installations in the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards regime.

I wish to confirm that the NPT and its universality and credibility depend, in the first place, on the steps to be taken by the countries that have deposited their instruments and that should give safeguards and guarantees to the rest of the States so that they can accede to the Treaty. In accordance with my country's firm interest in establishing lasting peace in the Middle East, we have spared no effort to attain this noble goal. In this respect, we again welcome Egypt's initiative to turn the Middle East into a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. We consider this initiative a natural step

towards achieving peace in the area and fulfilling the aspirations of the international community.

Illicit traffic in small arms has become one of the most important issues of universal concern. To end the illicit traffic in these weapons, especially in areas of conflict and tension, my country welcomes the General Assembly's call to hold an international conference to consider the illicit traffic in small arms in 2001, and hopes to participate effectively in the preparatory sessions for the conference. It reaffirms the need for those consultations to be based on the purposes and principles of the Charter in a manner that does not contravene the legitimate right to self-defence, in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter, nor compromise States' sovereignty.

My country attaches special importance to security and stability in the Indian Ocean. It is high time for this Organization to take all measures necessary to revive the work of the Committee on the Indian Ocean so that it can carry out its mandate in accordance with General Assembly resolutions.

With respect to the United Nations Register of Conventional Weapons, my country supports the draft resolution submitted to this Committee and considers it a resolution based on good will. We join other countries, particularly Arab countries, in their position that calls for expanding the machinery of this Register to cover other weapons.

In conclusion, allow me to express our thanks and appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Dhanapala, for his creative efforts to promote the work of the Department for Disarmament Affairs. As we reaffirm our readiness to cooperate fully with him, we look forward to a larger role and further relevant responsibilities to be assumed by this Department so that it too can change its cold-war-era thinking to one in line with the millennium spirit that we witnessed recently. We reaffirm our full confidence in his ability and wide experience to promote the work of the Department in the field of disarmament. We further welcome the steps that have been taken to give the Department for Disarmament Affairs specific input and mandates, as covered in the report presented by Mr. Brahimi on peace operations.

Mr. Moungara Moussotsi (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of this Committee that is responsible for disarmament and international security issues. I also congratulate the other members of the Bureau.

In his introductory remarks, the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Dhanapala, stressed in the most eloquent terms your diplomatic ability and skill and your vast experience in the area under consideration, all of which guarantees us success of our deliberations. Let me assure you of my delegation's modest support.

Never before has the world had such good prospects for dealing with the question of arms regulation and limitation. Indeed, except for some hotbeds of tension here and there, particularly in Africa, military conflicts between States have been significantly reduced. We certainly owe this respite to more active preventive diplomacy and to having succeeded in the implementation of international legislation regulating weapons at the multilateral and regional levels.

Since the signing in 1959 of the Antarctic Treaty, and indeed having passed through the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), several steps have been accomplished in the direction of arms reduction. Over the last decade, marked by the end of the cold war, further progress, just as significant, has been registered, notably with the conclusion on the global level of other Treaties and Conventions, including the Chemical Weapons Convention that prohibits the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons throughout the whole world and made it incumbent on the parties to destroy existing stocks. It would also be appropriate to cite here the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), prohibiting all nuclear explosions in any realm that was signed in 1996.

At the regional level, so-called denuclearized zones have been expanded, as witnessed by the signature in Africa of the 1996 Treaty of Pelindaba, prohibiting the production or establishment of nuclear weapons on the African continent.

Also noted with satisfaction is the increase in the number of countries that have ratified a number of these international instruments. Recently, my country Gabon proceeded to deposit its instruments of ratification of the 1992 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, and

the Ottawa Convention of 1997 on anti-personnel mines.

While we welcome this progress, it would be useful to see more commitment to the nuclear and general disarmament processes, as has been stressed by the leaders of the world at the recent Millennium Summit. In reaffirming their strong support for international peace and security, the leaders expressed strong hopes for more significant progress in the disarmament arena, particularly the vital need to eliminate weapons of mass destruction. They also emphasized the fight against small arms and light weapons.

Turning to future disarmament efforts, the Conference on Disarmament must agree on a programme of work, and on discussions of multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament. Moreover, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections that began following the 1997 agreements must continue and be fortified; this is true also of the obligation to adopt a phased programme of nuclear disarmament.

On biological weapons, my delegation is of the view that confidence-building measures with respect to the effectiveness of the prohibition of the manufacture and stockpiling of such weapons ought to be strengthened.

Similar measures should apply to the combat against conventional weapons and against small arms and light weapons, to which I referred a moment ago. Here, let me stress the issue of small arms and light weapons, which will be the subject of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects, which will be held in June and July 2001, and which my delegation welcomes. The problem is the excessive, illicit and destabilizing accumulation of these weapons. Africa feels directly concerned by the question of small arms because of their consequences in the armed conflicts that have shaken the continent, especially over the past 10 years. In these conflicts — nearly all of which are internal conflicts — it is small arms that are most commonly used and that claim a very high number of victims, among them women, children and old people.

These weapons are characterized by lightness, modest cost and ease of use and maintenance; as members can imagine, this makes them death-dealing tools prized by small clandestine groups that maintain ties with international criminal organizations involved in illicit drug trafficking and in prostitution. Moreover, it has now been proven that there are very close links among illicit transfers of small arms, the illegal exploitation of precious stones, especially diamonds, and the persistence of conflicts in Africa. It is thus no surprise that tensions on our continent should be focused on areas that are rich in precious stones. That is why my country considers that the United Nations Conference on small arms will provide an opportunity for us to consider ways and means to exercise better control over the production and sale of small arms and to address related issues.

My delegation agrees with those who feel that the Conference agenda should include matters related to the strengthening of international cooperation and to the need for Governments to supervise the domestic trade in small arms and international transfers of such weapons. Matters related to strengthening action in the context of post-conflict peace-building, including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, should also be prominent in the debate at the 2001 Conference. My delegation hails those countries that have already taken courageous initiatives in the fight against illicit transfers of small arms, such as the States of West Africa, which have declared a moratorium, and the States of Latin America. For its part, the Central African subregion is already studying the illicit traffic in small weapons. Just a few months ago, a subregional conference on this matter was held at N'Djamena, Chad.

My delegation views disarmament as a moral, humanitarian and indeed economic duty that both countries that possess weapons of mass destruction and others must accept if we wish future generations to enjoy a world free from fear. I wish also to stress the need to reallocate the colossal sums spent on the arms race to development efforts in the poorest parts of the world, so that we can better fight poverty. We call for the strict, good-faith implementation of existing disarmament agreements and for the pursuit of negotiations on further agreements, such as START III, aimed at further reducing existing arsenals.

Across the street from United Nations Headquarters is an inscription drawn from the book of Isaiah. Let me quote the entire passage:

> "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will

teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (The Holy Bible, *Isaiah, 2:3-4*)

The choice of that passage from Holy Scripture was no accident; the founders of the Organization, at San Francisco, drew inspiration from it to create the United Nations, one of whose purposes is the maintenance of international peace and security. Disarmament is the essential element of that purpose.

Mr. Jayanama (Thailand): On behalf of the delegation of Thailand, I wish to join previous speakers in congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the First Committee. We are indeed pleased to see a distinguished representative of South-East Asia elected to that important office, and we are confident that, with your expertise, knowledge and experience, you will fulfil your responsibilities with distinction. Our congratulations go also to the other members of the Bureau.

Thailand would like to associate itself with the statement made in the Committee by Viet Nam on behalf of the States members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

As we enter the new millennium, important disarmament and international security issues still remain with us. Why is this? Is it because countries such as Thailand and others like it are not active enough in the promotion of regional and international peace? Is it because we lack a common vision of international security to be realized in the coming century? Clearly, the answer lies elsewhere: we have not achieved as much as we would like because of the lack of political will among key States and because of the non-observance by States of relevant international norms and treaties, which has resulted in the continued proliferation of all types of armaments.

We are asking these sensitive questions as a committed promoter of regional and international security processes, and as an active member of key international disarmament treaties and agreements. Our ratification of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction last month was only the most recent testimony to our international commitment.

Permit me now to share some of our views on the current priorities for the international community. The most recent high point in terms of nuclear disarmament was the positive conclusion of the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The Conference made significant gains in consolidating the non-proliferation regime and in ensuring progress on nuclear disarmament. Thailand particularly welcomes the unequivocal commitment of the nuclear-weapon States to the total elimination of nuclear weapons in accordance with article VI of the NPT. That objective is central to all our efforts in nuclear disarmament, and we view that unequivocal commitment as constituting an important benchmark by which we will judge future progress in this field.

Besides their commitment under article VI, nuclear-weapon States also have the obligation under article IV to transfer nuclear technology for peaceful purposes to non-nuclear-weapon States. The task is now to ensure that those commitments made at the NPT Review Conference are translated into practice over the coming months.

As another focus of our efforts in this field, special efforts should also be exerted to encourage more ratifications and accessions to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), in particular by the 44 key States. The CTBT's early entry into force would contribute to ensuring that all types of nuclear tests were prohibited for all time, and would further consolidate the recent achievements in nuclear disarmament.

Besides the NPT, much more remains to be done to remove the threat of nuclear weapons. Every effort should be made to ensure strict adherence to international agreements relating to nuclear weapons and their means of delivery. Therefore, while we welcome President Clinton's announcement that he will leave the decision regarding national missile defence to his successor, we urge that the greatest degree of transparency be exercised on this important issue.

At this stage of the nuclear disarmament process we are also convinced that it is crucial to promote confidence-building activities. It is time for additional practical steps to be implemented by the nuclear-

weapon States, unilaterally or jointly to demonstrate their good faith on nuclear disarmament. Such steps could include reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons and introducing increased transparency in nuclear weapons' capabilities. This is why Thailand has supported the initiatives of the New Agenda Coalition, which has done much to inject greater impetus and fresh perspectives into the issue of nuclear disarmament. That is also why we welcome the Secretary-General's proposal to convene an international conference on ways to eliminate nuclear dangers, as well as proposals to launch, at the earliest opportunity, preparations for the convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

The effective functioning and expansion of nuclear-weapon-free zones constitutes a particularly positive contribution to global non-proliferation. Those zones serve to narrow further the geographical areas in which nuclear weapons can be used, and hence further the cause of disarmament. As the depository State of the Treaty on the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, otherwise known as the Bangkok Treaty, Thailand has long been one of the most enthusiastic promoters of the zone. Thailand recently concluded its chairmanship of the Commission for the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, which was characterized by efforts to ensure effective implementation of Treaty provisions, including through the establishment of clear working procedures for the executive organs of the Treaty.

During the past year progress has been recorded in the consultations with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), with an IAEA/Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) workshop on the implementation of the Bangkok Treaty having been convened at Bangkok from 23 to 25 August 2000. That workshop represented a major step forward in defining the IAEA's role in assisting States parties to ensure effective compliance with the Treaty, including on the important issues of safeguards, nuclear and radiological safety and nuclear-waste management. Thailand sees the Treaty as a cooperative endeavour involving both promotion and enforcement activities, with the IAEA playing a key role in both aspects.

Future activities would also benefit from the experience of other nuclear-weapon-free zones, and we would like to see more systematic cooperation between all such zones, as envisaged by the draft resolution on a nuclear-weapon-free southern hemisphere and adjacent areas. In that connection, Thailand welcomes the joint statement by the five nuclear-weapon States on security assurances in connection with Mongolia's nuclear-weapon-free status. We warmly congratulate Mongolia on that important step in the institutionalization of its nuclear-weapon-free status, and reaffirm that security assurances should be extended to all nuclear-weapon-free zones. Pending total nuclear disarmament, the provision of security assurances by nuclear-weapon States to nuclear-weapon-free zones should be seen by all as crucial confidence-building-measures within the overall context of the need to strengthen adherence to the NPT regime against current uncertainties.

At the same time, ensuring the support of the nuclear-weapon States for the Protocol to the Bangkok Treaty is central to future efforts to consolidate the zone. We hope that during coming months there will be greater progress in the consultations with the nuclear-weapon States on this issue. For the first time in over three years, we expect face-to-face consultations to be held in the course of the coming year with representatives of nuclear-weapon States, with whom we wish to address the key outstanding issues.

An issue to which Thailand attaches great importance is that of landmines. We are not a mine producer; instead we are its victim. As one of mine-affected countries, Thailand reiterates its commitment to the Ottawa Convention and urges all States that have not done so to sign the Convention or, at the very least, to abide by its spirit. We welcomed the outcome of the Second Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, which was held in Geneva last month, and the good progress recorded globally in ensuring that the Convention's objectives are met.

With the Thai Mine Action Centre as the focal point of our national efforts, Thailand stresses the importance of a comprehensive approach to the problem of landmines — from the destruction of stockpiles to the removal of landmines, mine awareness and victim rehabilitation. Nevertheless, that comprehensive approach not only depends on national efforts, but also requires the cooperation of neighbouring countries and the support of the international community. In particular, we believe that sufficient technical and financial support is vital to enabling mine-affected countries effectively to implement the political commitments entered into under the Ottawa Convention.

Much attention has been paid at this session of the General Assembly to the issue of small arms. There is now due recognition of the fact that the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons helps to feed conflict and contribute to political instability in various regions of the world. There is a need for concerted global action to counter this threat. At the same time, Thailand believes that, to be fully effective, solutions need to take into account the specific circumstances of various regions and the right of all States to take measures in self-defence in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter.

In that regard, Thailand welcomes the development of regional initiatives on small arms in various parts of the world. Within the Asia-Pacific region the question is now being discussed by the ASEAN Regional Forum as one of the transnational crimes of common concern. As a regional contribution to the preparations for the 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, a regional seminar on illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons was held in May in Jakarta. These are modest but important beginnings. Thailand hopes that the convening of the United Nations Conference will make a significant contribution to fostering greater regional and international cooperation on this issue. We support the efforts of Ambassador Dos Santos of Mozambique, as Chairman of the Preparatory Committee, in his consultations on various procedural and substantive aspects of the Conference.

Despite the current impasse on its programme of work, Thailand attaches great importance to the role of the Conference on Disarmament, as it is the single, standing multilateral negotiating forum on general disarmament. We therefore believe that a further expansion of its membership would enhance both its representativeness and effectiveness. Thailand has applied for membership. We hope that an early, positive decision will be taken on the Commission's expansion so that we and other applicants can play a more active role in that important forum.

A necessary step in overcoming any problem — disarmament included — is for the parties concerned to have opportunities to exchange views on the subject. For the Asia region, the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific has played that role, and more. We therefore express our appreciation for the contribution of the Centre and its directors in promoting regional and global peace and disarmament. We are anxious that their good work should be continued and, indeed, further strengthened. We therefore fully endorse the report (A/55/181) of the Secretary-General on the Centre. Thailand will continue to support the Centre's present interim arrangements, and believes that if Member States agree in the future to relocate the Centre, it should be to a location where it will be able to fulfil its mandate effectively and in a cost-efficient manner.

In concluding my remarks in this general debate of the First Committee, I cannot but observe that global disarmament efforts have not been very even. We have, on the one hand, excruciatingly slow efforts and progress in nuclear disarmament, and on the other rapid advances towards the elimination and control of conventional weapons such as landmines and small and not-so-small arms. My delegation therefore appeals to those major players that can affect both regional and global peace and stability to take a more balanced approach to disarmament. Only then will we be able to make sustainable progress towards achieving common security for the benefit and safety of all.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Let me say first, Sir, how pleased I am to see you, a very close friend from Myanmar, a very friendly country, in the chair. Given your broad experience in international relations, and in particular your expertise in the field of disarmament, I am confident that you will guide the work of this Committee to a successful conclusion. My delegation assures you of its full support and cooperation in the fulfilment of your duties.

We would like also to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Ambassador González of Chile for the excellent work he did as Chairman of the Committee during its previous session.

This session is taking place at the dawn of a new millennium. As we are all embarking together on this new era, together we should exert every effort to achieve global peace based on collective security. There should be no room for unilateralism in international affairs, including in the field of international arms control and disarmament. One should not seek security for oneself alone and leave others under threats and in fear. In our opinion, security should be global and collective and thereby bring durable peace to the world at large.

The successful conclusion of the 2000 Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) marked a crucial step in our common effort in favour of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. This is the first time in history that the nuclear-weapon States have shown their commitment to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. This has given hope to the non-nuclear-weapon States that they will be guaranteed against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. In this regard, we are of the view that the world community should turn this outcome into practical measures that would lead to nuclear disarmament and the building of a world free from nuclear weapons.

Efforts exerted in the nuclear disarmament field in recent years have yielded some progress. The United States and the Russian Federation have reduced their nuclear arsenals through the START process, and other nuclear-weapon States have taken unilateral measures to reduce their nuclear weapons. In this context, we highly appreciate the ratification of START II and of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) by the Russian Federation, and we call on other States to do the same as soon as possible. Any actions that aim to achieve the objective of nuclear disarmament can only help to secure the survival of all humankind.

Four years have passed since the adoption of the CTBT, a significant Treaty which bans nuclear-test explosions in all environments. Today that Treaty has not yet come into force. Many countries argue that the Treaty did not specify a time-bound framework for the total elimination of all nuclear weapons. Naturally, we cannot but agree with this. However, in our opinion, the CTBT, although imperfect, if sincerely and strictly implemented, would help prevent the nuclear-weapon States from improving their nuclear stockpiles and the non-nuclear-weapon States from acquiring nuclear weapons. For all of these reasons, the Lao People's Democratic Republic deposited with the United Nations Secretary-General, on 2 October 2000, its instrument of ratification to the CTBT. This testifies to our firm will and aspiration to live in peace and build a world free from nuclear weapons.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic welcomes and supports the strong aspirations of peoples in many parts of the world in their efforts to establish nuclear-weapon-free zones. The establishment of such zones would permit the peoples of those regions to be free from the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons. In this context, we are of the view that it is important to underline that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones should be based only on arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic shares the concern of other countries regarding the issue of missiles. For over two decades, the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty has been considered to be a cornerstone of global security and has served as a crucial element in the maintenance of stability and the global strategic balance. In this regard, we appeal to all States parties to the Treaty to fully and strictly comply with all of its provisions. We appreciate the decision made, and believe it is the right one, not to deploy a missile defence system, and we hope that such a deployment will never take place.

Since the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1997, we have witnessed many positive developments. In this spirit, we express the hope that the world community will continue its efforts and lay the groundwork for the more effective implementation of that Convention, despite the various difficulties encountered.

As to the Biological Weapons Convention, my delegation shares the view that a verification protocol should follow the principle of equality and strike a balance between rights and obligations. Any attempt to inspect others while exempting oneself or to conduct more inspections on others and fewer on oneself would defeat the very purpose which we all aim to achieve. In this respect, we would like to emphasize that in dealing with this issue, the use of biotechnology for economic development and peaceful purposes should be accorded due consideration.

Like many other delegations, the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic regrets very much that the Conference on Disarmament was unable to reach an agreement on the programme of work this year. This is the third year in which the Conference on Disarmament has failed in its work. In this context, we urge all the parties concerned to redouble their efforts, demonstrate the necessary flexibility and move forward in their efforts in favour of both nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament.

We share the concern of the international community over the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines. In this regard, while noting the Ottawa Convention, we maintain the view that States

have the legitimate right to use such weapons for the defence of their national independence and territorial integrity, as provided for in the Charter of the United Nations.

Another reality that mankind has had to face in recent years is the problem of small arms and light weapons. These types of weapons have had dreadful consequences for the peoples of many countries. The Lao People's Democratic Republic supports the convening of the Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, to be held next year. Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, to be held in next year. In this regard, we reiterate that any efforts to resolve the issue of small arms and light weapons should take due account of the right of States to possess and transfer those weapons for purposes of self-defence and protection of sovereignty, as defined in the United Nations Charter.

Confidence-building measures continue to play a positive role in promoting the process of disarmament, as well as in encouraging understanding among States in the regions concerned. In this context, we very much appreciate the holding in Jakarta last June by the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific and the Government of Indonesia, in cooperation with the Government of Japan, of a regional seminar on the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons. The Lao People's Democratic Republic fully supports the Centre's initiatives, programmes and activities and believes that consultations on the issue of its relocation should continue with a view to finding ways or possibilities that will not affect its activities.

At the dawn of the new millennium and at the turn of the century, all world leaders and Governments have sent a clear message that nuclear weapons are the only weapons that threaten human survival. States and nations, working hard in hand, should therefore do their utmost to put an end to this threat. As a member of the United Nations, and true to its policy of peace, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, together with other nations, will continue to do everything humanly possible and work resolutely in this direction in order to gradually build a world free from nuclear weapons.

On this note, I wish the present session of our Committee great success.

The Chairman: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina to introduce the report (A/55/281) of the Group of Governmental Experts on the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms on the continuing operation of the Register.

Mr. Grossi (Argentina): First of all, allow me to congratulate you most warmly, Sir, on your election to chair our Committee during this year's session. We are confident that under your able guidance, this body will discharge its duties with efficiency.

I have the pleasure today of introducing the report on the continuing operation and further development of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, as mandated by resolution 54/54 0 of 1 December 1 1999 on transparency in armaments. The General Assembly gave our group the very specific mandate of looking into the functioning of this mechanism, and in doing so to take into consideration the work of other bodies, including the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission, in order to produce a balanced assessment of the operation of this important tool for transparency and confidence-building.

This exercise was not an easy one. The experts faced the challenge of analysing an impressive volume of data and information accumulated over the past eight years, evaluated possible problems, explored remedies and proposed practical suggestions, accomplishing all of this without losing sight of the prevailing political circumstances in which the register evolves. The task was hard, but we emerged from it with a renewed sense of the importance of the Register as a confidence-building measure designed to improve security among States.

All the experts agreed, without hesitation, that the establishment of this mechanism, as part of a broader range of international efforts to promote transparency, was indeed a step in the right direction. Our faith in its potential to help prevent the destabilizing accumulation of arms, ease tensions and promote restraint in arms transfers remains intact.

In sum, the experts were able to reaffirm the validity and relevance of an instrument that is approaching its tenth anniversary. I should like briefly to highlight some of the most important findings of our work.

Our group analysed data and information submitted by Governments to the Register for the last

eight calendar years. These confirmed that over the years the level of participation has remained one of the highest, compared with similar international reporting instruments. There are, of course, ups and downs in the curve, but it is fair to say that the Register has reached a level of participation which regularly approaches 100 States. Our report contains a number of figures and graphics that illustrate this trend.

Conventional wisdom tells us that statistics can support different, and sometimes even opposing, conclusions. When it comes to the levels of participation in the register, some view the bottle as half full; but some view it as half empty. What is important, in my view, is that the Register has maintained a fairly consistent level of participation that allows us to observe what the Register covers on the qualitative side, which is the great bulk of arms trade in the seven categories of conventional weapons, as almost every significant supplier and recipient of such systems submit their reports regularly.

But of course the goal of universal participation has not yet been reached. Gaining wider participation in the register is of the highest importance. Greater awareness of the functioning of the Register, and a deeper familiarity with its procedures, is necessary. Every effort should be made to make sure that we reach out to those that, for different reasons, may have chosen not to participate or to do so on an irregular basis. In this context, it is worth noting that many States which do not participate would likely fall in the category of "nil" reporters; these are countries that simply do not buy or sell in the seven categories.

After looking into all these problems, the group put forward a number of recommendations to which I will refer shortly. Systematic study of the figures and submissions by States has also led us to the conclusion that many States are willing to give more information on their transfers by using the "Remarks" column in the reporting format, and by providing the type and designation of the transferred equipment. This is a most encouraging political message in favour of transparency and predictability.

The original resolution, 46/36 L, approved by the General Assembly in 1991, initiated a dynamic process based on provisions for expansion through the addition of further categories of equipment, on the inclusion of data on military holdings and on procurement through national production. Since then, successive reviews have tried to tackle this question, without succeeding in creating such an expansion.

Aware of the underlying political differences on this matter, our group engaged in an extensive and detailed technical examination of the seven categories. We studied the present definitions in order to establish their validity in the present security and technological environment. We hope that our report will benefit from this effort, since an attempt was made for the first time to systematically present some of the issues affecting the relevance of each of the seven categories in view of the evolution that has taken place since the establishment of this instrument almost 10 years ago. It is our hope that these elements will be taken up in future reviews so that the Register will adapt to an ever-changing environment.

Obsolescence is a danger that we have to avoid if we want the system to be meaningful and relevant at the military level. Nobody wants a Register that deals with equipment that will soon be superseded by technological progress or by the emergence of new concepts affecting the designation of large destabilizing categories of equipment, which underlie this mechanism.

Along with the technical discussions, the question pertaining to the expansion of the scope was again considered by the group. Although the objective of an early expansion has not been achieved yet, additional degrees of transparency remain firmly inscribed in the Register's agenda, but that objective is not easy to achieve. As we all know, this instrument deals with armaments, and any substantial modification depends on the political and security climate of the times. As the Register continues to accumulate data and information of increasingly good quality, I can only hope that participating States will soon agree on taking an additional step forward in the direction of confidence and transparency.

This time, the report includes a well-focused region-by-region evaluation where variations in participation are clearly revealed. This approach should allow us to undertake the necessary actions to promote the Register in different parts of the world according to specific priorities and needs. I am particularly encouraged by the fact that our group has unanimously recommended the holding of regional or subregional seminars and workshops to promote greater participation. These activities, which will start early

next year, are critical in order to increase the number of participants.

In the early years of the Register, a number of such meetings were organized in different parts of the world, and this enabled the newly created mechanism to rise to an unprecedented height for that kind of exercise. Now, almost 10 years after that beginning, it is time to go out again and promote, explain and bring on board more countries. I am happy to see that important States are playing a leading role in the field of transparency in armaments, and they have already pledged their support to facilitate the work of the Department of Disarmament Affairs as the focal point in this promotional effort.

Finally, the recommendations section of the report introduces a number of practical measures aimed at facilitating States' participation and the Secretariat's handling and management of the Register.

The report is there for your consideration, and it speaks for itself. It is the result of a hard-won consensus among a number of extremely qualified experts whose joint efforts I have had the honour to coordinate over the past few months. We have spared no effort to respond in the best possible manner to the mandate given to us by the General Assembly.

Before concluding, allow me to share with you some personal thoughts on the exercise we have just concluded and on the road ahead for the Register. The Register is now a consolidated, integral part of the security landscape. It is functioning, and, as I said before, currently covers a large portion of the legitimate trade in seven important categories of conventional weaponry. But we can do better; near universality is what we want.

This is why we have to go out to the regions to make a serious effort to get the widest possible participation. An up-to-date, relevant Register is what we want. This is why our technical deliberations — long overdue in the eyes of some, premature for others — need to continue. I encourage you to bring this message to your respective capitals, as we will have to prepare for the next phase in the gradual improvement of the Register.

Our discussions indicated that there are zones where the Register approaches the realm of small arms and light weapons. A loophole has been identified, and action will have to be taken.

The international community is placing high hopes on next year's Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Our deliberations have shown great concern in vast areas of the world about the effects of transfers of weapon systems that lie somewhere between what is small- and medium-sized and the categories covered by the United Nations Register. We hope that the 2001 Conference may benefit from our conclusions in this regard.

Transparency in weapons of mass destruction has been a recurrent issue since the Register's inception. We analysed this question again and came to the agreed conclusion that this issue needs to be considered by the General Assembly because our Register covers only conventional armaments. This clear division of labour will surely benefit all interested parties, since it allows the Register to proceed and places a problem of global concern in the right forum.

In closing, let me extend my warmest thanks to the experts who participated in this exercise. It was they who made this report possible. I would like to name them one by one: Colonel Gerhard Schepe of Germany, Ambassador Maria Krasnohorská of the Slovak Republic, Ambassador Mitsuro Donowaki of Japan, Mr. Onno Kervers of the Netherlands, Lieutenant Colonel José Rufino Menéndez Hernández of Cuba, Mr. Mansour Salsabili of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Giora Becher of Israel, Mr. Pyotr Litavrin of the Russian Federation, Ms. Debra Price of Canada, Mr. Satish Mehta of India, Mr. Jyrki Iivonen of Finland, Mr. Shahbaz of Pakistan, Ms. Maria Angélica Arce de Jeannet of Mexico, Mr. Wu Haitao of China, Mr. Paulo Cordeiro de Andrade Pinto of Brazil, Ms. Christine Seve of France, Colonel Falah Al-Jam'an of Jordan, Mr. Patrick Tsholetsane of South Africa, Mr. Giovanni Snidle of the United States of America, Mr. Andrew Wood of the United Kingdom and Mr. Anthony Oni of Nigeria.

The Register of Conventional Arms is a practical, yet unique, instrument in the family of confidence-building measures. I am convinced that, as time passes, we will fully realize how useful it is and, more importantly, how significant it could still become in our efforts to promote peace and security around the world.

This report is a humble step in that direction.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.